

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for his comments.

As a new member of the Committee on Armed Services, I look forward to working with the Committee on International Relations to support this alliance.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to my colleague, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DEUTSCH).

Mr. DEUTSCH. Mr. Speaker, this is really an exciting day, I think a great day, for our Congress; and I thank the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. CANTOR) for bringing this resolution in front of us. It is clearly a bipartisan effort from both sides of the aisle, but it is also an opportunity for the world's greatest and oldest democracy, the United States of America, through our Chamber, to express our thanks that another democracy exists in a region of the world with too few democracies.

One thing that I think about often in this Chamber is literally right above us is, there is a series of law-givers that look down upon us in this Chamber. And there is only one that has a full frontal relief, and it is Moses literally right in front of us in this Chamber, and it is a part of the world that we are linked to as Americans in many direct ways.

To put in perspective, though, for just a couple of seconds what Israel has gone through in the last several months, over 500 Israelis have died through acts of terrorism since the Oslo Agreements. Over 500 people have died in the most horrendous and horrific circumstance that we have seen and we read about over that period of months.

What would that mean if it happened, God forbid, in the United States of America? What would the equivalent number be? It would be 25,000, 25,000 Americans in our society being killed through acts of terrorism. I do not even think we can contemplate what that would mean as individuals and as a society.

I think many of us understand what the battle is still going on and we thought the battle had ended really of the right of Israel to exist. That is really unfortunately what it seems the battle is still about. It is a battle that is, in a sense, literally not hundreds but thousands of years old. And it is a real question that is there an acceptance of Israel's right to exist from the Palestinian people, or is the thought that this is still a group of people who are like the Crusaders, who are going to last several decades and then leave.

I do not think anyone here believes that. I do not think anyone here thinks that. I do not think there is a soul in Israel that believes that or thinks that. But until that acceptance is there, I think the possibility for peace is more problematic and difficult.

We praise the democracy of Israel, and I think all of us look forward to the opportunity that Ariel Sharon has in this moment of time, that all of us

know historically, there is a moment in time that he can reach out in terms of a hand of peace and a clear hand of peace that others have not been able to do. And I think the words of this Congress and the deeds of this Congress to offer our assistance in that effort are complete, united, and 100 percent.

I urge adoption of the resolution.

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CANTOR. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of the time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of House Resolution 34 and would like to thank the gentleman from Illinois (Chairman HYDE), the gentleman from New York (Chairman GILMAN) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LANTOS) for their leadership on this issue.

On February 6, the Israeli people went to voting booths. What they said was loud and clear. They said, enough, enough violence, enough of the policy of peace, enough conceding of land and security. And if we listen closely, we will hear something else, we will hear the people say they do not want peace at any cost but peace with security.

It is appropriate today that we congratulate the people of Israel in completing a successful and peaceful transition of power through a democratic election. The election of Ariel Sharon as Israel's Prime Minister, coupled with the new Bush administration, signals a new era for the U.S.-Israel relationship and a new era for the Middle East.

Peace will not be sought for the sake of a legacy. I believe very strongly that the United States must maintain its commitment to Israel's security as a fundamental basis of its involvement in the peace process. Any peace deal must come through direct negotiations between Israel and its neighbors without any prerequisites or forced solutions.

As President Bush's National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice has said, "We should not think of American involvement for the sake of American involvement." American involvement should occur when we can advance the cause of peace.

We must not impose an artificial deadline on the players in the Middle East. Peace must come on their terms, not ours. Peace must come with security, not in spite of it.

Israel has always made a sincere commitment to peace in the region. Many times their commitment to peace has caused the loss of lives and land. We need to make sure we stand with and support our only Democratic ally in the region.

I join my colleagues today in congratulating Ariel Sharon on his election and welcome a continued dialogue about how to best stop the violence and bring about peace and stability in this vitally important region.

Both the United States and Israel are off on the right foot in this new era, and I look forward to working toward a solution that brings peace with security.

Mr. WAXMAN. Mr. Speaker, as one of America's staunchest allies and the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel continues to set a shining example of free and fair elections, the peaceful transition of power, and vibrant political discourse.

I congratulate Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon on his victory and wish him well. I share the Prime Minister's conviction that Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat must bring an end to the violence and reign in terrorism.

The Israeli election on February 6 once again demonstrated why the strong bond between the United States and Israel is continually reinforced by our shared values and shared goals. This is the foundation for America's firm solidarity with the State of Israel.

Mr. BENTSEN. Mr. Speaker, as a co-sponsor, I rise in strong support of this resolution, which commends the people of Israel for conducting a free and fair election, and reaffirms the important bonds between the United States and Israel.

On February 6, 2001, the people of Israel elected a new Prime Minister, Likud Party Leader Ariel Sharon. At this time of transition in Israel, I believe it is appropriate to commend the leadership and vision of Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Less than two years ago, Israelis elected Mr. Barak as their Prime Minister, after he aggressively campaigned to pursue lasting peace agreements with the Palestinians and their Arab neighbors. It's fair to say that Mr. Barak delivered on his promise to go the extra mile in the name of peace. During his tenure, Prime Minister Barak withdrew Israeli forces from Lebanon, expressed a willingness to negotiate the return of the Golan Heights to Syria, and offered the Palestinians statehood and control over sections of Jerusalem. Regrettably, after offering more in the name of peace than any of his predecessors, the Palestinian leadership left Mr. Barak's offers at Camp David's negotiating table, favoring instead a return to terror and violence, as witnessed over the past four months in the West Bank and Gaza. Despite the tireless efforts of Mr. Barak and the personal involvement of President Clinton, a peace agreement was not realized. With the far-reaching proposals offered by Mr. Barak now off the table, and with a new Administration in the United States, the future of the peace process remains unclear.

Despite these developments, there is room for optimism. Since his election, Prime Minister-elect Sharon has displayed a willingness to embrace a coalition government, with his overtures to Mr. Barak to join his cabinet as Defense Minister, and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres as Foreign Minister. Yes, some may say that these moves are calculated to meet the statutory 45-day requirement to form a coalition government. But more importantly, these initial gestures may display Mr. Sharon's pragmatic intentions to continue the peace efforts initiated by his predecessors. I hope that is the case. I have also been encouraged by the actions of Secretary of State Colen Powell, who recently announced his intention to travel to the Middle East later this month, and has remained in regular contact with the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

The resolution we are considering today expresses strong support for the State of Israel, and for its commitment to the democratic ideals of freedom and pluralism. Importantly,